

Federal Emergency Management Agency. I welcome him most sincerely to the Washington community.

Director Allbaugh has pledged to work closely with state and local governments. I believe this is the key to effective response. I encourage him to direct additional energies to expanding the ability of local agencies to respond immediately to those disasters that can be foreseen but not scheduled.

In my State of Alaska, we are familiar with natural disasters. We have experienced them, from storm flooding to tsunamis, to the great Alaska earthquake of 1964. We know the value of a strong federal presence during such crises.

I know that he is interested in my State. He has visited before, and I hope to be able to welcome him back as soon as possible—preferably with a fishing pole in hand, not on some less welcome occasion.

Joe Allbaugh is a big man with big skills. His reputation is that of an extremely accomplished manager with extraordinary abilities, and he has worked on campaigns that have given him knowledge of key issues in a majority of the states. These traits will be important to the smooth operation of FEMA, which is faced with extraordinary pressures in the event of a major disaster, as we have seen in past events. I am confident that he will serve our people and our communities well during times of need.

As the Governor's chief of staff in Texas, he both helped respond to immediate crises, and helped shape his state's disaster response processes. He now has the opportunity to do the same thing on a much grander scale—one which will be felt in every state of our great country. I look forward to his guidance in this critical and sensitive arena.

Mr. NICKLES. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays on the nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Joe M. Allbaugh to be Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency? The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. NICKLES. I announce that the Senator from Utah (Mr. BENNETT), the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. BUNNING), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. CRAPO), the Senator from Texas (Mr. GRAMM), the Senator from Utah (Mr. HATCH), and the Senator from Wyoming (Mr. THOMAS), are necessarily absent.

I further announce that, if present and voting, the Senator from Utah (Mr. BENNETT) and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. BUNNING) would each vote "yea."

Mr. REID. I announce that the Senator from Florida (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Georgia (Mr. MILLER), and the Senator from Maryland (Mr. SARBANES) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FITZGERALD). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 91, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 13 Ex.]

YEAS—91

Akaka	Durbin	McCain
Allard	Edwards	McConnell
Allen	Ensign	Mikulski
Baucus	Enzi	Murkowski
Bayh	Feingold	Murray
Biden	Feinstein	Nelson (FL)
Bingaman	Fitzgerald	Nelson (NE)
Bond	Frist	Nickles
Boxer	Grassley	Reed
Breaux	Gregg	Reid
Brownback	Hagel	Roberts
Burns	Harkin	Rockefeller
Byrd	Helms	Santorum
Campbell	Hollings	Schumer
Cantwell	Hutchinson	Sessions
Carnahan	Hutchison	Shelby
Carper	Inhofe	Smith (NH)
Chafee	Inouye	Smith (OR)
Cleland	Jeffords	Snowe
Clinton	Johnson	Specter
Cochran	Kennedy	Stabenow
Collins	Kerry	Stevens
Conrad	Kohl	Thompson
Corzine	Kyl	Thurmond
Craig	Landrieu	Torricelli
Daschle	Leahy	Voinovich
Dayton	Levin	Warner
DeWine	Lieberman	Wellstone
Dodd	Lincoln	Wyden
Domenici	Lott	
Dorgan	Lugar	

NOT VOTING—9

Bennett	Graham	Miller
Bunning	Gramm	Sarbanes
Crapo	Hatch	Thomas

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is tabled and the President is notified of the confirmation.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will return to legislative session.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative assistant proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BROWNBACK. I ask unanimous consent to proceed as in morning business for up to 5 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I rise today to address an urgent issue in the rural parts of my State regarding a problem we are having with the digital divide being created. What is taking place is that in urban and suburban areas, they are getting access to high-speed Internet access so people can get on and get large quantities of data about which they can communicate back and forth rapidly. That is occurring and it is a good thing.

In the rural areas of my State and in many places across the country, they

are not getting access to high-speed Internet. They have the old type of carrier that can get Internet access. They have Internet access, but they cannot get the high speed. Less than 19 percent of rural areas across the country have that high-speed Internet access compared to over 80 percent of the suburban areas across the country.

I will shortly be submitting a bill to try to address this inequity that is taking place and to keep this digital divide from further exacerbating the economies in suburban areas versus rural areas. The bill I put forward last year was the Regulatory Relief Act. It provides regulatory relief for those companies operating in rural areas to go ahead and deploy high-speed Internet access, and then not have to sell this new equipment at a reduced market price. It provides a regulatory relief to them to be able to do so.

I have worked on this issue for some period of time. We have worked on it in the Commerce Committee. There have been hearings held in the Commerce Committee on this. In the past, typically in the United States, when one of these sorts of situations starts to develop where rural areas get hindered because of their population being spread over wide areas versus urban areas, the Congress has frequently stepped in, the U.S. Government has frequently stepped in. Rural electrification and rural telephony come to mind, where you wouldn't have gotten distribution in the rural areas because it was just so far between people and the private companies could not make money. In this situation, we are not going to have to put resources forward but, rather, we have to put regulatory relief forward for the investment that will take place.

I have contacted a number of private sector groups that are looking at this and saying they will invest if we will provide them some regulatory relief. We will get that number up from 19 percent to a much higher number.

Last year, in the bill we put forward, and what we will put forward this year as well, is a requirement that, to get the regulatory relief, there has to be an increased deployment into the rural areas. That will be part of this as well.

It is a common theme in Washington today that broadband Internet access is revolutionizing the ways in which ever greater numbers of Americans are using the Internet. No longer a domain of simple data, graphics, and pictures, broadband access and its faster transmission speeds are transforming the Internet from a 56 bit-limited medium into a multi-megabyte medium, the practical outcome of which are functions such as video on demand, invaluable real-time telemedicine, improved distance learning, and powerful new tools for consumers and businesses alike on the e-commerce frontier.

Yet, as we revel in this technological marvel, we continue to find ourselves faced with the reality that there has been and continues to be a growing digital divide in our Nation—a separation